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SUBJECT: ARRESTED MALAGASY MAYORS RECEIVE DUE PROCESS

REFTEL: A) ANTANANARIVO 718

B) ANTANANARIVO 434

¶1. The verdicts from the trials of two political opponents of President Ravalomanana were recently made public. After five months in pre-trial detention, former Mayor of Tamatave and presidential candidate Roland Ratsiraka (REF A) was acquitted October 4 of embezzlement of government funds and failing to record the purchase of sound systems. He was convicted and sentenced to 18 months of "suspended" prison time for awarding a bid to his own garbage collection company.

¶2. After eight months on the run and less than three months in pre-trial detention, former Mayor of Fianarantsoa and presidential candidate Pety Rakotoniaina (REF B) was sentenced October 5 to five years in prison for embezzlement of government property. He is still awaiting a decision on the charges of infringement of electoral laws; offenses against law enforcement officers; and threatening the life of the Chief of Region.

¶3. COMMENT: Given their high profile as opposition leaders, many observers and opposition members have claimed the government targeted the two men for political reasons. However, Post is satisfied both were brought to trial in a timely manner and appear to have received due process. Ratsiraka has already been released and is celebrating in Tamatave, but the one charge that stuck will likely hurt his chances in the upcoming December 12 municipal elections. END COMMENT.

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